

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Irritable Bowel Syndrome or IBS is a chronic disorder of the large intestine that can cause cramping, abdominal pain, bloating, gas, diarrhea or constipation, or both, and mucus in the stool. These symptoms may come and go over time, and may get more severe as the individual ages.

There are many different causes, and they are different for each individual. These causes include intestinal muscle contractions, an abnormality of the nervous system, intestinal inflammation, and infection caused by virus or by bacterial over growth.

Along with general causes, IBS seems to have triggers. Triggers can include certain foods, such as cabbage, milk, carbonated beverages, wheat, dairy, citrus fruits, and beans. Other triggers include stress and hormones. While stress doesn't cause IBS it can aggravate the symptoms and make them more severe and women are two times more likely than men to develop IBS.

Some risk factors include being under the age of 50, being a female who has had estrogen treatment before, and or, after menopause, having a family history of IBS, and having a mental health disorder such as anxiety or depression. With these risk factors in mind, when should you seek medical attention? IBS may need medical treatment if you have experienced severe weight loss, diarrhea at night, rectal bleeding, iron deficiency anemia, unexplained vomiting, difficulty swallowing, or persistent pain not relieved by passing gas or having a bowel movement.

So you have been diagnosed, how is this disorder treated you ask? Treatment includes changes in diet, stress management and possibly medications. But to start off, here are a few tips from a dietician to help manage things.

1. **Keep a food diary.** This will help you track your symptoms and match symptoms up to potential food triggers. Once you find a trigger, you can remove it from your diet for 3 weeks or so, then gradually add it back in based on your tolerance.
2. **Consider a low FODMAP diet.** FODMAP stands for Fermentable Oligo, Di, Mono-saccharide and Polyols. This is a group of carbohydrates that are not well digested by some. This diet is not suggested for long term use as your body can miss out on necessary nutrients. If you decide to try this diet it should be done under the careful supervision of a registered dietician or your physician.
3. **Create good eating habits to improve digestion.** These include eating three meals a day, without skipping, eating SLOWLY, chewing your food well and eating in a relaxed manner, do not over eat or go for seconds, avoid carbonated beverages as they can lead to a build up of gas in your intestines, do not drink through a straw, and avoid chewing gum as it can make you swallow excess air.
4. **Try a probiotic.** There are many over the counter varieties that can help put good bacteria in your system. Do this with an increase in dietary fiber for the bacteria to feed off of. Things such as rolled oats, oat bran, butternut squash, pumpkin, papaya, bananas, sweet potatoes, and any peeled fruits and veggies.

5. **Drink water as your main source of fluid.** This helps decrease your risk of constipation, and helps to keep you hydrated.
6. **Curb your stress.** I know this is easier said than done. Try exercise, yoga, meditation, reading, religious practice, all of these things can help reduce stress.
7. **When in doubt, consult a dietician.** They can walk you through all the massive amounts of information on the internet, and make sure you are still getting the nutrition you need to stay healthy and happy!

When in doubt about treatment, symptoms, risk factors, or starting a new exercise regimen make sure you talk to your physician!